



Tom Barrett
Mayor, City of Milwaukee

State of the City Address
February 14, 2008

Fellow Milwaukeeans and special guests, I am honored to stand before you today to present my fourth State of our City Address.

Ladies and gentlemen, the state of our city is officially SNOWY.

Thank you to Alderman Robert Puente for hosting us in your district.

Also, I want to say a special thank you to Bob Hillis and his team for his introduction and for hosting us here at Direct Supply.

Two years ago, I announced a partnership with Bob and the state of Wisconsin that would keep Direct Supply in Milwaukee and afford it the opportunity to expand and add 1,500 jobs.

The City created a \$13 million financial package to make this project possible and as a result, we are retaining and adding high-quality, high-tech jobs to our local economy.

I want you all to know that companies like Direct Supply, who choose to remain and grow in the City of Milwaukee, have strong partners at City Hall.

When I took office nearly four years ago, Milwaukee needed an infusion of economic development financing and additional resources directed to public safety and our neighborhoods.

Since that time, I have worked with Common Council President Willie Hines, Finance Chair Michael Murphy and the Common Council to aggressively deploy public resources and economic development tools to put us on track for continued growth.

And it shows.

Last year, Milwaukee's quality living standards inspired the AARP to recognize Milwaukee as one of the top five cities in America for people to retire.

Forbes.com recognized Milwaukee as one of the best cities for young professionals in the country, and ranked us the 6th most affordable place to live well in America.

Also in 2007, Dow Jones Marketwatch looked at factors such as concentration of top companies, unemployment rates, and job creation to rank the top cities for business centers.

As a result, Milwaukee was ranked 18th - 18th-best in the nation – besting bigger cities like Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Phoenix.

And the good news continues.

My Administration has leveraged over 11,000 jobs in the City of Milwaukee over the last four years.

In 2007 alone we were able to create over 2,600 new jobs and retain over 2,000 more, increasing the number of employed residents in the City by 2,191 according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

That number ranks Milwaukee higher than Minneapolis, Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia, Indianapolis, Cleveland and others.

After years of declining population and listening to the doomsday scenarios, I decided it was time to challenge the U.S. Census Bureau over our population.

So last year, we put a team together, filed the challenge and we won.

The acknowledged increase of over 30,000 residents reverberates beyond city government.

With that adjustment, Milwaukee jumped Boston, Seattle, and Washington, D.C. in the ranks of America's largest cities.

In addition to the impact on federal aid, this victory also paints a positive portrait of Milwaukee.

We've worked hard to achieve these successes.

Together with the Common Council, I have directed resources to create the strongest police department in a decade.

At the same time, I am leading efforts such as Safe Streets Milwaukee, the Community Justice Council, Common Ground and the Homicide Review Commission.

This year, I will be working with the Medical College of Wisconsin and our Health Department to develop a public health strategy to address violence prevention.

As I see it, there has never been a better time for unity and partnership in our city to address crime and violence.

We have a new police chief. For those of you who have not met him, I would like to introduce Chief Ed Flynn.

Chief Flynn has already begun to implement district policing plans. We have launched plans in the 2nd, 3rd, 5th, and 6th districts. The 4th and 7th district plans will be announced soon.

The strong partnerships that have been developed with the U.S. Attorney, Department of Corrections, District Attorney, city departments and community organizations are paying off.

We're going to target the criminals. And with the resources our law enforcement partners bring to the table, we are going to take back our public spaces and maintain a police presence to ensure order.

We're going to focus on licensed premises and nuisance properties and we're going to step up our efforts keep an eye on offenders released onto our streets.

Milwaukee Police Officers have tough jobs.

Every day presents demands and stresses that only members of the force and their families can comprehend.

On Nov. 6th, 2007, two Milwaukee police officers were shot in the line of duty.

Officer Alejandro Arce and Jose Lopez were responding to a shooting of two teenagers on the city's south side when they were shot at by a 15-year old with a semi-automatic handgun.

I'm happy to say that these two men are here with us today, along with Officer Pat Pajet who was in squad car at the time and administered first aid. Please join me in thanking all three of them for their selfless service on our behalf.

Another critical public safety partner is our Fire Department, led by our new Fire Chief, Doug Holton, a Milwaukee native who joined us last June from St. Paul.

Chief Holton, welcome home.

The members of Milwaukee's fire department have much to be proud of, yet get very little attention for the work they do.

Let me give you a couple of examples.

On the morning of August 31, 2007, four children aged two to nine, were trapped on the second floor of a house fire on North Holton Street.

Lieutenant Michael Nowak of Engine Company 21, while gearing up to enter the residence heard the children frantically screaming for help.

Immediately, Lt. Nowak jumped over fire on the first floor and carried two of the children to safety.

As a result, Lieutenant Nowak sustained second-degree burns on his hands.

Please join me in honoring Lt. Nowak for his heroism during this rescue.

Just this past Monday night, Firefighter Jason Oberg and Fire Lieutenant William Echeverria, two of our finest paramedics, saw an armed robbery in progress.

They put their lives on the line and went after the suspect -- they caught him, held him, and made sure the victim was safe until police arrived.

We thank these men and all the men and women who serve our city in every capacity, including all those snow and salt operations folks at DPW – they are working around the clock to deal with the tremendous amount of snow and ice this winter.

I'm grateful for your commitment and thankful for your tremendous service on behalf of our residents.

Now, let's get to business.

Like our nation, our city's economy is entering a period of uncertainty.

Foreclosures as a result of unscrupulous sub-prime lending are looming. Fuel and healthcare costs are increasing.

I know that people in the City expect value for services provided. And many feel that their property taxes are high enough.

I will maintain my promise to hold the line on taxes while constantly looking for efficiencies in City government without sacrificing performance.

I have made a promise to the people of this City to make Milwaukee safer and stronger.

Through neighborhood improvements, advancements in public safety, progress on economic development and a heightened effort to connect more workers to jobs, I am doing just that.

We are certainly headed in the right direction but there is more work to be done.

One year ago, I announced my intention for the City to take the lead on workforce development for our region.

I was pleased that Governor Doyle granted our request and since we took the helm on July 1, we've worked to transform the system to be more demand-driven and customer responsive.

This spring, I will launch the Milwaukee Business Services Unit.

This unit will provide employers and businesses seeking workers with a single point of contact.

My goal is to make it quick and easy for businesses to meet their immediate needs as well as for Milwaukee to attract new businesses to our great City.

As we look to our regional economic needs, Next Generation Manufacturing is an integral part of our competitive advantage in a global economy.

I am working with the Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board and its regional partners to prepare our local workforce for these opportunities.

Our location on America's Fresh Coast and the fact that we are home to a number of progressive companies like Johnson Controls, Rockwell Automation, Badger Meter, and others, uniquely positions us to retool our workforce.

We want to prepare future workers for jobs and careers in green manufacturing, green construction and energy conservation.

We know there is no better solution to poverty than good, family supporting jobs.

I want to ensure Milwaukee has the best Career Opportunity Centers in the country

I want to continue to get young people energized and working, to create hope in their lives and prepare them for a successful future.

Last year was the third year of my Summer Youth Jobs program, which has placed thousands of high school students in summer jobs in city government, the private sector and non-profit organizations.

I see Alderman Joe Davis here today, a great partner in this effort.

I want to build on the success of this program. Today I am announcing my year-round Youth Employment Initiative.

Through this initiative, we will create 1,550 summer jobs and year-round opportunities for young people in the City.

Over the course of this year we will be launching a series of programs aimed at working with community and faith-based partners to reach out to these young people.

I strongly encourage business owners to hire young people for summer or year-round jobs.

As adults, we have a responsibility to create hope in the lives of our children.

Members of our workforce team are here today and have with them pledge cards for this year's youth employment program.

I encourage all of you who have the ability of putting one young person to work ... or 20, or 100 ... to stop by and fill out a pledge card.

Let's set a new record for hiring our young people this year.

Just as we are improving the landscape for residents to find jobs, we are working to promote and support small business ownership in Milwaukee.

Last year, we developed an action plan for reforming the Emerging Business Enterprise program to foster local small business and job growth.

As a result of our efforts, certifications of new Emerging Business Enterprises increased by 28% last year --demonstrating strong small business growth and development in the City.

Milwaukee is the hub for our regional and state economy, and we must ensure that our City contracting dollars benefit our local businesses.

I am working with the Common Council to increase the EBE requirement on construction contracts from 18 to 25 percent.

I also want to adopt a local business standard that will give companies right here in Milwaukee a 5 percent incentive when they bid city contracts.

To prepare residents with the ability to obtain family-supporting jobs, we must empower each school-aged child with the tools to learn and grow.

Through our public library system, we are helping children develop pre-reading skills to improve literacy.

Librarians and volunteers are tutoring city schoolchildren and providing counseling on college and career options.

Today I am announcing a partnership with the "I Have a Dream"® Foundation on a program to help children from low-income areas reach their education and career goals.

Thanks to a generous contribution by Ted and Mary Kellner, we have secured the initial investment necessary to provide the entire incoming first-grade class of Clarke Street Elementary School in Metcalfe Park with the opportunity to be our first class of "dreamers."

The project will work with these children and their families from elementary school through college to ensure their success.

Their prospects are promising.

In communities with low graduation rates, "I Have a Dream" participants are graduating at rates of 80 to 100 percent.

I also want to thank the others who've stepped up to make this possible: Legacy Bank, the Brinn Foundation, the Weiss Family Foundation and the Herzfeld Foundation.

As residents benefit from increased education and employment opportunities, families will become stronger.

This is central to our success as a city.

Strong families provide a source for an individual moral compass and a sense of personal responsibility.

We must work hard to empower the men and women of our community to create nurturing, supportive families.

In 2007, we hosted the 2nd Fatherhood Summit.

With the help of the Milwaukee Fatherhood Initiative Executive Committee and its many partners, we empowered 2,500 men who came together to share ideas about how to be a better parent and re-engage with their children.

Plans are already underway to grow and formalize this initiative thanks to a grant from the Milwaukee Foundation.

We continue to make progress on our efforts to improve children's health and reduce our infant mortality rate.

One year after Columbia-St. Mary's and the University of Wisconsin awarded the Milwaukee Health Department almost \$1 million for a home visitation program for pregnant first-time moms, the Nurse Family Partnership is up and running.

Thanks to a grant from the CDC and the hard work of the Health Department and collaboration with MPS, our immunization rates are up almost 20 percent.

Now close to two thirds of all MPS students are meeting minimum immunization requirements prior to entering school.

Thanks to strong partnerships with property owners and grants from HUD, we are making great progress on eradicating childhood lead poisoning.

This year, the Health Department will complete another 1,775 lead-safe housing units in the City of Milwaukee.

I've already touched on some of the good news about Milwaukee's economy and there is more.

I frequently point to our success in the Menomonee Valley, a model of economic transformation and environmental sustainability.

What formerly was Wisconsin's largest Brownfield is today the home of 2,100 new jobs and growing.

The Valley represents economic and environmental renewal.

Last year, Milwaukee's Menomonee Valley was named one of the nation's top ten renewal projects by the Sierra Club.

I have announced my intention to recreate this success in the 30th Street Industrial Corridor.

With the leadership of Common Council members Willie Wade and Ashanti Hamilton, we declared the 30th Street Corridor our 'Greenlight' District – a place where I want public investment to leverage private investment.

Since declaring the Corridor a priority, we've directed \$19.6 million in public funds to the area and leveraged another \$19.9 million in private investment.

To further strengthen the city's south side neighborhoods, last month I signed legislation that will pump \$3.1 million into projects that will revitalize the Historic Mitchell Street commercial district and several adjacent residential neighborhoods.

This will keep Mitchell Street an active, thriving shopping area.

Funds will be used to renovate landmark commercial buildings, like the former Goldman's Department Store and the Modjeska Theater.

The project is possible because the City has a strong partner in the Historic Mitchell Street business improvement district.

I've also signed legislation championed by Alderman Terry Witkowski to create a garden district to highlight the importance of the city's southern gateway.

Another sign of our dedication to the continued Milwaukee Renaissance is our commitment to Bronzeville, a cultural and entertainment district to spark revitalization along West North Avenue.

To strengthen the neighborhood, the City made 26 vacant lots available for \$1 for new home construction.

Last month we broke ground on one of the first new homes to be built in Bronzeville.

Manpower employee Tara Ali wanted to live closer to her job at the new Manpower International World Headquarters downtown.

Tara is now on her way to owning a piece of the American dream.

We must empower all city residents by providing them with opportunities for home ownership and entrusting them with the responsibilities that come with it.

In the City of Milwaukee last year, we sustained almost the same number of new single-family homes that we did during the building boom of 2005.

But, as we continue to weather turbulent times in the national housing market, I have directed my Administration to do everything possible to stem the tide of foreclosures in our city.

Now, let's talk transit.

One of the most powerful economic development tools any city can utilize to create new opportunities is a modern, integrated transportation system that unites the region and connects workers to jobs.

As a community we must confront the stark reality that our current transit systems stands on the precipice of disaster.

2008 marked the 7th consecutive year the current transit system either cut routes, raised fares – or both.

We all know that if our system proceeds on its current path, it will be forced to slash service by almost 35% in just a few short years.

No major city can thrive and flourish without a modern transportation system that serves those who must get to and from a job.

I have proposed a plan for a modern transportation system that moves our region forward.

The plan is financed by \$91.5 million in federal funds set aside more than 16 years ago to improve mass transit in Milwaukee - dollars that have gone unused for far too long.

We cannot stand by and watch these critical funds go to another community while we continue to waste the opportunity to modernize and improve our ailing, outdated system.

While other plans have been introduced, my plan is the only one that offers a common-sense compromise that fully utilizes these federal dollars and will provide the Comprehensive Transit Strategy that Milwaukee needs.

Our community has waited far too long.

The time has come for the key stakeholders to come together, find middle ground and reach an agreement on a new vision for our transit system.

While we work to improve transportation in the City of Milwaukee, we must also strive to implement a more strategic and thoughtful approach to transit throughout Southeast Wisconsin.

Recently the State approved a \$1.9 billion expansion of I-94 from the Mitchell Interchange down to the Illinois State Line.

This would be the most expensive road construction project in Wisconsin's history.

At the same time, important mass transit initiatives like the Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee Commuter Rail Line, and expansion of high-speed intercity rail along the heavily traveled Milwaukee-Chicago route to places like Madison and up to the Twin Cities, remain stalled.

No one is saying that the State should stop investing in highway construction.

It is time, however, to strike a balance between highway investments and transit improvements.

I thank Governor Doyle for his commitment to AMTRAK and our daily train service between Milwaukee and Chicago. Without a doubt, that investment is paying huge dividends for our local and state economy.

It's time to apply the success of the Milwaukee to Chicago AMTRAK service to the region's other transit needs.

At a time when energy costs and environmental concerns are at the forefront of the domestic agenda, shouldn't we be demanding that integrated transportation planning become a reality here?

Why is it that when the big transportation plans are rolled out, the only thing being advanced is a highway or freeway expansion?

Let's look at other states.

The Colorado Department of Transportation included transit alternatives when planning for the expansion of the I-70 corridor through metro-Denver.

The Florida Transportation Department is taking the lead role in planning a 61-mile commuter rail line in Central Florida.

Maryland has a State Transit Administration which operates and funds commuter and regional transit lines.

Virginia makes a substantial investment in regional transportation as do other states.

Our region's growth must be planned with multi-modal transportation options - options that are presented fairly, accurately and with the same vigor and support as current highway plans are.

As I wrap up this morning, you can see how all our efforts on behalf of the residents and businesses in Milwaukee are paying off.

We will continue to seek empowerment from our state and federal government to provide for and protect our taxpayers on issues such as the school choice funding flaw and police pay.

But before I conclude today, I want to address two issues that demand our attention and our collective action.

The first is the Great Lakes Compact.

Wisconsin must pass it.

If there is a resource our City and region cannot afford to put in jeopardy, it's Lake Michigan Water.

I understand that there are legislators, interest groups and individuals who would like to weaken the Compact guidance that was recommended by the Great Lakes Governors.

To do so would be a mistake.

The management of the Great Lakes basin is a multi-state, two-country proposition.

To say otherwise ignores the geo-political reality of the Great Lakes region.

Diversions and water sales are complex business.

If you don't believe me, pick up a copy of the latest issue of National Geographic and read the article on the Drying of the Western States.

In 25 to 50 years, the fight over the Colorado River Basin could lead to our front door. The boom in the desert will not go on indefinitely.

Not everything in the Compact is ideal but I am willing to work with it as long as water is returned to the basin and Milwaukee continues to grow economically within the region.

Now, I have very serious reservations regarding an approval process that involves the Southeast Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission.

Unless the make-up of the Commission changes to reflect the population of the City of Milwaukee, I would be hard-pressed to rely on SEWRPC to protect Milwaukee's interests.

That said, Wisconsin needs to pass a strong Compact and needs to do so now.

The second issue that we must address is illegal guns.

In recent DAYS we have again been confronted by a string of shootings in our neighborhoods.

I have been an outspoken advocate of strengthening Wisconsin's gun laws for a long time.

I have brought the issue to you at the three previous States of the City addresses.

I have met with legislators, the Governor and have gone in front of community groups and churches to get something done.

Thugs with guns are bad for Milwaukee. I'm all for locking up anyone who uses a gun to commit a crime – lock them up for a long time.

But we have to stop the flow of illegal handguns into our neighborhoods and into the hands of folks whose only intent is to use that gun to commit a robbery, a murder or to shoot up someone's home or car.

It's just too easy to get an illegal handgun in Milwaukee.

Last year, we took more than 2,700 guns off the streets. In the last four years, more than 10,000 guns have been seized.

That's excellent police work. But it also highlights the insane level of illegal guns out there.

We have got to close the gun show loop hole. All gun sales have to be subject to background checks.

We must be able to trace guns used in crimes back to their purchasers.

We need to know where the illegal guns are coming from and who's selling them.

I can't get this done alone. I need your help.

I need you to make this a priority.

Please contact your elected officials in Madison and tell them to work to get the illegal guns off Milwaukee's streets...

It's true that we face challenges, but together we can work to find solutions to continue to keep Milwaukee on a positive forward trajectory.

After all, it is the people of Milwaukee who make our city a great place.

That was evidenced when 4,000 local residents volunteered during the National Veterans Wheelchair Games last year – a stunning outpouring of compassion and hospitality that helped Milwaukee earn the 2007 Most Patriotic City award from the Paralyzed Vets of America.

Phil Rosenberg with the Wisconsin Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America is here today. I want to recognize him and thank the Wheelchair Games for choosing Milwaukee. Come back anytime!

The games exemplified the tremendous spirit of the people of Milwaukee. It's that spirit that will keep us moving forward.

Finally, for generations the portrait of Milwaukee included the annual Great Circus Parade.

A half million people or more would line our streets, fill our hotel rooms and restaurants and take part in one of our nation's truly historic events.

It's time to bring back the parade and once again showcase Milwaukee's fine tradition of hospitality and our revival. It is my hope we will be able to do this in 2009.

I'm proud of our city and feel privileged to serve the residents and businesses that call Milwaukee home.

As long as I am Mayor we will continue these positive trends.

We will continue to meet the challenges that face us all head on.

And we will continue to make the State of our City strong.